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## Tool 4 – Targeted Solutions for Reducing Turnover

### This Tool Includes

- The definition of each solution.
- General descriptions of how each solution works and what may limit its success.
- Why each solution works in basic terms.
- The relative cost and impact of each solution.
- Challenges and considerations in implementing each solution.

Just as there is no single cause of turnover, there is no single solution. The causes of turnover in your agency and the specific situation you are facing will determine which solutions you choose to implement. In addition, exactly because each agency is unique, the impact any given solution may have on that agency is difficult to predict.

### Cost and Impact Definitions

We have provided our “best assessment” of the **Cost** and **Impact** of each of the Targeted Solutions using the following three-level key:

### Cost

**\$** Virtually no new costs to the agency. Can be done with existing staff and resources.

**\$\$** Moderate cost to the agency, but less than 1 percent of payroll.

**\$\$\$** Considerable cost to the agency, in excess of 1 percent of payroll.

### Impact

**\*** May impact the turnover decisions of only a few individuals.

**\*\*** Expected to have moderated impact on the overall turnover rate, reducing it by up to 10 percent (e.g., from 40 percent to 36 percent)

**\*\*\*** Expected to have a significant impact on the overall turnover rate, reducing it by more than 10 percent.

Our assessment is intended to serve only as a general guideline. The Cost/Impact assessments are based on our experience and research. Costs and Impact may vary considerably depending on the specifics of implementation. Also, many of the “high cost” Targeted Solutions are expected to have a disproportionately small impact on turnover. However, in most instances, there are other good reasons to implement the solution. For example, reducing paperwork and providing safer working conditions have significant benefits beyond reducing turnover.

## Targeted Solutions

Table 1 (page 37-8) identifies the possible solutions that, if designed and implemented correctly, should help reduce turnover in your agency. Each solution is “cross-walked” to the turnover problem it’s designed to correct. There are multiple possible Solutions for most of the Reasons for Turnover. Likewise, any one Solution may impact multiple “Reasons for Turnover.”

The remainder of this Tool is intended to help you think through the implementation of any given Solution. It does not provide a specific recipe that will guarantee a reduction in turnover at your agency. It is intended instead to get you thinking creatively about which solutions might work in your agency.

Cost: \$\$\$

*Advance Hiring*

Impact: \*\*\*

**What It Is** Advance Hiring is a recruitment and selection process that is based on hiring new employees in anticipation of vacancies expected to occur in the future. The intent is to have a pool of “hired and trained” new employees that can be assigned to a vacancy as soon as it occurs.

**How It Works** Management uses historical vacancy and turnover data to project the number and location of vacancies expected to occur several weeks into the future. Employees are hired based on those projections and sent to new-worker training. Upon completion of training, the new workers are assigned to vacancies that have arisen while they were in training. If there are fewer vacancies than newly trained workers, they are assigned to temporarily “fill behind” employees on leave of absence or used as “extra help” until permanent vacancies arise. The program can be funded by diverting dollars from funded unfilled vacancies into an advanced hiring pool account.

**Why It Works** Advance Hiring primarily impacts turnover resulting from high workloads and worker burnout by speeding up the hiring process. Slow hiring processes and unfilled vacancies drive up workloads for everyone. When jobs can be filled quickly with “already-trained” new hires, workers are relieved of the stress of covering vacant caseloads while attempting to manage their own workloads.

**Challenges and Considerations** To benefit from Advance Hiring, an agency must be large enough to have somewhat predictable turnover. The model also is geared to agencies that provide formal classroom training to groups of new hires before they are assigned the responsibility of carrying a caseload.

## Causes of Employee Turnover

| Solutions to Employee Turnover | Admin./ Paper Work | Bens. | Burn-out | Career Growth | Client Rescs. | Suppt. from Commy. | Court Issues | Hours Conflict | Job Fit | Org. Culture | Pay Issues | Profess. Devel. | Profes-sism. | Safety Concerns | Super- vision | Inadeq. Training | Unmet Job Expects. | Work. Conds. | Work- load |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|-------|----------|---------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|---------|--------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| Adv. Hiring                    |                    |       | x        |               |               |                    |              |                |         |              |            |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    |              | x          |
| Behav. Intersvs.               |                    |       |          |               |               |                    |              |                | x       |              |            |                 |              |                 |               |                  | x                  |              |            |
| Career Lad./Tier               |                    |       |          | x             |               |                    |              |                |         |              | x          | x               | x            |                 |               |                  |                    |              |            |
| Caseload Reduc.                |                    |       | x        |               |               |                    |              |                |         | x            |            |                 | x            |                 |               | x                |                    |              | x          |
| Competitive Pay                |                    |       |          |               |               |                    |              |                |         |              | x          |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    |              |            |
| Degree Incentive               |                    |       |          | x             |               |                    |              |                |         |              | x          |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    |              |            |
| Diversity Progs.               |                    |       |          |               |               |                    |              |                |         | x            |            |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    |              |            |
| Flex Time/Job Share            |                    |       | x        |               |               |                    |              | x              |         | x            |            |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    |              | x          |
| Good Place to Work             |                    |       | x        |               | x             | x                  | x            |                |         | x            |            |                 |              |                 | x             | x                |                    |              |            |
| Improve Phys. Environ.         |                    |       | x        |               |               |                    |              |                |         | x            |            |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    | x            |            |
| Job Restruct.                  | x                  |       | x        |               |               |                    | x            |                | x       |              |            |                 | x            |                 |               |                  | x                  |              | x          |
| Job Rotation                   |                    |       | x        | x             |               |                    | x            | x              |         |              |            | x               |              |                 |               |                  |                    |              |            |
| Just Ask                       |                    |       | x        | x             |               |                    |              | x              |         | x            |            | x               |              |                 | x             | x                | x                  | x            |            |
| Mentor                         |                    |       | x        | x             |               |                    | x            |                | x       | x            |            | x               |              |                 |               | x                |                    |              |            |
| Paperwrk Reduc.                | x                  |       | x        |               |               |                    |              |                | x       |              |            |                 |              |                 |               |                  | x                  |              | x          |
| Perform.-Based Pay             |                    |       |          |               |               |                    |              |                |         | x            | x          |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    |              |            |
| Perform. Mgmt.                 |                    |       |          | x             |               |                    |              |                |         | x            |            | x               |              |                 | x             |                  |                    |              |            |
| Realistic Job Prev.            | x                  |       | x        |               |               |                    |              |                | x       |              |            |                 |              |                 |               |                  | x                  |              |            |
| Safety Support                 |                    |       |          |               |               |                    |              |                |         |              |            |                 |              | x               |               |                  |                    |              |            |
| 2nd Lang. Incent.              |                    |       |          |               |               |                    |              |                |         |              | x          |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    |              |            |
| Super. Develmt.                |                    |       |          |               |               |                    |              |                |         |              |            | x               |              | x               | x             |                  |                    |              |            |
| Telecommute                    |                    |       | x        |               |               |                    |              | x              |         |              |            |                 |              |                 |               |                  |                    | x            | x          |
| In-Serv. Training              | x                  |       | x        |               | x             |                    | x            |                |         | x            |            | x               |              |                 |               | x                |                    |              |            |
| Tuition Assis.                 |                    | x     |          | x             |               |                    |              |                |         |              | x          | x               |              |                 |               | x                |                    |              |            |
| Univ. Partners.                |                    |       |          |               |               |                    |              |                | x       |              |            | x               |              |                 |               |                  | x                  |              |            |

| Cause                     | Definition   |
|---------------------------|--|
| Administrative/Paper Work | Caseworkers, who want to do "real social work," become frustrated with administrative duties such as paperwork, transporting clients, meetings, etc.   |
| Benefits                  | Inadequate benefits to meet employee's basic needs, primarily in the areas of health care, retirement and vacation.  |
| Burnout                   | Caseworkers find themselves emotionally unable to work productively and may find it difficult to continue working. Burn out may be caused by high levels of stress resulting from heavy workloads, erratic hours, poor supervision, the emotionally draining nature of the work, or simply because the employee is a "poor fit" for the job. |
| Career Growth             | Employee feels that there are few promotional opportunities to "grow" as a caseworker either professionally or financially.  |
| Client Resources          | Caseworker becomes frustrated with the agency's inability to meet some of the basic needs of children and families. May also be frustrated with lack of other community resources.   |
| Community Support         | Caseworkers do not feel that their profession and/or agency is respected in the community. Negative media coverage.  |
| Court Issues              | Caseworker may be uncomfortable in court room situations, feel disrespected by attorneys and judges, and placed on the defensive. May feel court is another administrative burden that detracts from social work role.   |
| Hours Conflict            | Caseworker may be required to work long hours to stay "caught up." Some jobs require working overtime or being "on call" during evenings and weekends, thus interfering with personal and family life.   |
| Job Fit                   | There is a poor match between the requirements of the job and the employee's skills, values, and/or personality.   |
| Organization Culture      | The atmosphere of the agency is not one that employees regard as being supportive, positive, or one where they feel valued by supervision and upper management.  |
| Pay Issues                | Pay is insufficient to meet basic needs or expectations. Pay may not be competitive within the community. Agency's internal pay practices may be regarded as being unfair.   |
| Professional Development  | Agency does not provide training or other developmental opportunities to improve professional skills or to prepare for promotional opportunities or career advancement.  |
| Professionalism           | Caseworkers believe that the child welfare job has become so structured and regulated by policy that their opportunity to function as a professional has been eroded.  |
| Safety Concerns           | Workers have concerns about their physical safety.   |
| Supervision               | Poor quality supervisors do not provide the leadership skills necessary to support and develop their staff.  |
| Training Adequacy         | Basic skill training is inadequate to provide new employees the basic skills necessary to do the job. Skill training for experienced employees is inadequate or the employee does not have the time to attend because of other work priorities.  |
| Unmet Job Expectation     | New employees find the job to be very different than they thought it would be when they accepted it.   |
| Working Conditions        | Poor physical surroundings -- inadequate office space and equipment, buildings in bad repair or bad location, inferior technological equipment and support.  |
| Workload                  | High caseloads, and otherwise heavy workloads, create stress and anxiety.  |



Cost: \$\$

Impact: \*\*\*

### *Behavioral Interviews*

**What It Is** [Behavioral Interviewing](#) is a technique that focuses on an applicant's past experiences and behaviors in order to determine how they would behave in similar situations in the future. This interviewing technique is based on the premise that past behavior is predictive of future behavior.

**How It Works** Agencies identify the "competencies" (knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes and other characteristics that are associated with or predictive of superior job performance) that are most important for the child welfare position. In order to demonstrate how well an applicant's skills align with these competencies, interviewers ask applicants questions about how they have handled certain situations in the past. For example, a question for the "decision making" job competency might be, "Can you tell me about a specific situation where you had to make a very difficult work-related decision?" The interviewer would continue to ask probing, follow-up questions such as, "What made it such a difficult decision for you?" "What alternatives did you consider?" "Why did you choose that particular alternative?" "How did the situation turn out?" Behavior-based interviews generally result in better selection decisions than more traditional interviews.

**Why It Works** Employees who are a "good fit" for the job are less likely to leave. The behavioral interview provides the opportunity to obtain the depth of information necessary to make good selection decisions. Since the competencies identified for the position are the ones critical to successful performance, selecting applicants able to describe examples of how they have performed successfully in these areas will go a long way in helping determine if they are a good fit for the job.

**Challenges and Considerations** Organizations should identify the competencies that are associated with successful job performance and design behavioral interview questions related to those competencies. Conducting good behavioral interviews requires that interviewers be trained in the techniques of behavioral interviewing, asking probing follow-up questions, and scoring/evaluating the applicants.

Cost: \$\$

Impact: \*\*

### *Career Ladder/Tier System*

**What It Is** A Career Ladder/Tier System (we use these terms synonymously although some agencies may define them differently) for child welfare workers is designed to allow employees to advance through classification levels and/or pay grades while continuing to provide direct client service.

**How It Works** Typically the agency will establish two or three additional classification levels (in successively higher pay grades) that employees can advance through as they gain experience, academic credentials and/or licensure. For example, for a four-level system:

- Level 1 could require a BA degree with a human service major.
- Level 2 could be a BA degree with five years of child welfare experience or a MSW degree with three years experience.
- Level 3 could be a MSW with five years of child welfare experience.
- Level 4 could require a MSW, five years of child welfare experience and state licensure.

Depending on the system’s design, more complex cases and greater latitude in judgment would be required as an employee advanced from one level to another.

**Why It Works** Career Ladders and Tier Systems provide an opportunity for career growth and increased pay in a profession notorious for low pay and the absence of career mobility. The system can be designed to provide professional development opportunities and allow workers to function in a more professional capacity as they move up the Ladder/Tiers.

**Challenges and Considerations** A well-designed Career Ladder or Tier System has greatest potential for reducing turnover among more highly motivated employees. Less motivated employees may not be as interested in earning an advanced degree and/or licensure. In order to avoid paying different pay rates to employees doing the same work, some agencies assign the most complex cases and difficult workloads to those in the higher tiers.

Cost: \$\$\$

Impact: \*\*\*

*Caseload Reduction*

**What It Is** A Caseload Reduction occurs when enough additional workers are introduced into the system to make a meaningful difference in workload. The Child Welfare League of America recommends caseloads of between 12 and 15 children per worker, and the Council for Accreditation for Children and Family Services suggests that caseloads not exceed 18 children per worker.

**How It Works** Caseloads can only be reduced by increasing the number of workers or reducing the number of cases. Although good “prevention” programs can potentially reduce the number of Protective Services and/or Foster Care cases, measurable caseload reductions normally occur as a result of adding child welfare workers. Some agencies have successfully convinced their appropriations authority (i.e., legislature, board of commissioners, executive board, etc.) to fund

additional positions. Others have diverted their human resources within the agency from lesser priority programs.

**Why It Works** Lower caseloads provide workload relief, and reduce the incidence of stress and burnout. Lower caseloads also should permit workers more time to attend training (without feeling overwhelmed by work when they return), allowing them to feel more competent and less frustrated. As workers have more time to spend with children and families, they will also very likely believe they are providing better service to their clients.

**Challenges and Considerations** For a caseload reduction to have a meaningful impact on turnover, the reduction must be great enough for child welfare workers to feel a significant impact on workload.

Cost: \$\$\$  
 Impact: \*\*\*  
*Competitive Pay*

**What It Is** Assuring Competitive Pay may require a market rate adjustment. Ultimately, agencies may have to implement a market rate adjustment in order to close the gap in pay.

**How It Works** A significant market rate adjustment is made to the entry and maximum rates of the pay range and current incumbents are given an equivalent pay rate adjustment.

**Why It Works** Child welfare workers are among the lowest paid of any professionals having the equivalent credentials and qualifications.

**Challenges and Considerations** If pay fails to meet the employee’s basic needs, or is regarded as being simply unfair, it becomes what’s called a “dissatisfier.” Once employees feel they are being paid fairly, pay won’t keep those who are unhappy with their workload, their supervisor, or who are just a “bad fit” for the job. In other words, insufficient pay can be a huge dissatisfier, however once pay is competitive for the market, it won’t keep people who are otherwise unhappy in your agency.

Cost: \$\$  
 Impact: \*\*  
*Degree Incentive*

**What It Is** A Degree Incentive provides those who obtain a Masters Degree additional pay.

**How It Works** Agencies pay a higher pay rate to those who possess a Masters Degree in the required discipline, even though their duties and responsibilities may be identical to those employees with Bachelor’s Degrees. Some agencies require a MSW, others a Masters in a human services field; others may also include degrees such as a Masters in Public Administration or a law degree.

**Why It Works** Providing extra pay for those with a Masters Degree may be effective in addressing the issue of low pay, and may also provide an incentive for current employees to obtain an advanced degree.

**Challenges and Considerations** Degree Incentives may be a more effective recruitment device than a turnover solution. Some employees may resent the fact that those with an advanced degree, and perhaps less experience, can earn more money for doing the same work. Agencies may either want to assign the more difficult cases to those with the Master’s degree, and/or clearly articulate the rationale for the degree incentive when it is introduced.

|           |                           |
|-----------|---------------------------|
| Cost: \$  |                           |
| Impact: * | <i>Diversity Programs</i> |

**What It Is** Diversity Programs are organizational efforts to implement policies, practices and procedures to insure that the workforce is inclusive of employees from a wide variety of backgrounds including race, age, gender, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic status.

**How It Works** Agencies that value diversity create programs to recruit and hire a diverse workforce and require inclusivity in all aspects of organizational life. Specific examples of Diversity Programs would include diversity training, diversity awareness weeks (where the agency and its employees

sponsor activities to promote the understanding and value of diversity), and specialized recruitment strategies.

**Why It Works** Agencies that value diversity are very likely ones that consistently place value on the workforce and are supportive and reaffirming of employees in general.

**Challenges and Considerations** Diversity programs will have a greater impact on overall turnover when combined with other organizational practices that promote a healthy work environment.

|            |                              |
|------------|------------------------------|
| Cost: \$   |                              |
| Impact: ** | <i>Flex Time/Job Sharing</i> |

**What It Is** Flex Time and Job Sharing are work scheduling systems that allow employees to work hours that are more convenient to their personal and family needs.

**How It Works** *Flex Time* schedules typically permit employees to work more hours on certain days of the week in order to work fewer hours (or perhaps no hours) during other traditional work days. For example, rather than work the traditional eight-hour, five-day work week, an employees may be allowed to work 40 hours in four 10-hour days or in four 9-hour days along with one 4-hour day.

Another Flex Time variation might permit employees to work the traditional five 8-hour days, but modify their start, quit, and lunch times as long as they work certain “core hours.”

*Job Sharing* allows two employees to share one job – and perhaps even one caseload. Job sharing is similar to half-time work, but in many job-share situations the burden is on the employee to find another willing half-time worker. Some agencies even require the job-share employee to work full time if the job-share leaves the work arrangement.

**Why It Works** Non-traditional work scheduling systems give employees a greater degree of control in balancing work with their family life. Working fewer hours (as with job sharing and part-time work) may also reduce the workload stress and burnout associated with full-time work. Employees who place a high value on such scheduling options may remain with the agency because they are unable to find other employers willing to provide similar scheduling options.

**Challenges and Considerations** Some managers believe that permitting flexible work schedules makes it more difficult to provide optimal office coverage (particularly on Mondays and Fridays), schedule all-staff meetings, and track time and attendance.

Cost: \$  
Impact: \*\*\* *Becoming a “Good Place to Work”*

**What It Is** A Good Place to Work is an agency that aligns its beliefs, values and practices specifically toward meeting this objective.

**How It Works** Agencies that want to be regarded by their employees as a good place to work generally place an emphasis on making employees feel valued and supported. Because of the very significant impact that the frontline supervisor has on employee satisfaction, many agencies provide extensive training to supervisors and hold them accountable for their leadership and team-building skills. Effective Human Resources departments are designed to provide supervisors and managers with the tools they need to support, develop and reward employees.

**Why It Works** Employees want to be treated as valued contributors to the agencies for which they work. When an agency realigns its beliefs, values and practices to support employees, it can expect job satisfaction to increase and turnover to decline.

**Challenges and Considerations** Even though agency leaders may want to change the organizational culture to become more supportive of employees, many organizations

still have frontline supervisors and middle managers who are authoritarian, “burned out,” or simply lack good supervisory skills. Turning around a negative organizational culture can be challenging.

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Cost: \$\$\$ | <i>Improving the Physical Work Environment</i> |
| Impact: **   |  |

**What It Is** Improving the Work Environment includes taking steps to make the physical work space more pleasant.

**How It Works** Improving physical surroundings can range from relocating office space to better buildings in safer neighborhoods to making physical plant improvements (e.g., heating, ventilation, security, office equipment, and interior design) in the current space.

**Why It Works** A dreary office coupled with equipment that does not work contributes to overall burnout. Correcting these problems makes it possible for employees to remain on a job they otherwise find satisfying.

**Challenges and Considerations** Like low pay, poor physical surroundings are a dissatisfier. Employees who do not believe their basic needs for working in a reasonably safe and healthy environment are being met are likely to leave. However, beautiful offices with fine furnishing will not prevent

employees from leaving if they are not valued by the agency or their workload is oppressive.

|           |                          |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Cost: \$  | <i>Job Restructuring</i> |
| Impact: * |                          |

**What It Is** Job Restructuring requires making significant changes in the way employees perform their work in order to make the job more satisfying. Tasks and functions can be added, changed or eliminated, depending on the desired outcome.

**How It Works** The agency must first identify those parts of the job that child welfare workers find most satisfying and dissatisfying. There may be some parts of the job that are almost universally disliked (e.g., paperwork and record keeping), but some parts of the job are satisfying to some and distasteful to others. Some workers find doing investigations, appearing in court, and providing case management oversight to be highly satisfying while others do not.

Redesigning one job into two separate jobs may result in the ability to assign employees to that part of the original job that they found most satisfying. For example, some agencies structure the Children’s Protective Services job so that the same employee does the initial investigation of abuse and neglect and continues to carry the ongoing case. In other agencies, the investigations and case management functions

are divided into two different jobs. Or, case aides may perform the more routine aspects of the job allowing the child welfare worker to spend more time on the more professional elements of the job.

**Why It Works** Abundant evidence exists showing that increased employee loyalty and reduced turnover is associated with providing employees with the opportunity to do what they do best and find most satisfying.

**Challenges and Considerations** Job restructuring is likely to have a greater impact in agencies where pay and benefits are adequate and workloads are manageable. The real challenge to restructuring jobs requires organizations to engage in some “out of the box” thinking about how work can be done differently.

|           |                     |
|-----------|---------------------|
| Cost: \$  | <i>Job Rotation</i> |
| Impact: * |                     |

**What It Is** Job Rotation involves transferring employees between different jobs within the agency for a temporary period of time.

**How It Works** In agencies where child welfare workers are assigned to various specialized programs, rotating them between programs gives them an opportunity to take a break from the highly stressful assignments and also provides an

opportunity to learn new skills. Although there may be classification implications (although probably not insurmountable), employees could rotate between child welfare jobs and the jobs of policy writers, trainers and program analysts.

**Why It Works** Providing a respite for employees who are “burning out” due to the nature of the job may provide the temporary relief needed in order to reenergize them when returning to their former job or another “high stress” position. That person may have otherwise left the agency entirely. The temporary assignment may also be welcomed as an opportunity to gain the additional experience that could better prepare individuals for promotional opportunities.

**Challenges and Considerations** Job rotations can be disruptive for the families served by workers who rotate to different assignments. Also, there can be relatively few “respite positions” compared to the stressful positions in most agencies. Some employees may resist rotating back to high-stress positions. Rather than have a formal job rotation program, an agency may prefer transferring long-term employees in more demanding assignments to less stressful jobs on a permanent basis. Although this strategy may not reduce turnover in the stressful assignments, it may reduce overall agency turnover.

Cost: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ *Just Ask*  
Impact: \*\*

**What It Is** A Just Ask program encourages (or requires) each supervisor to ask each of his/her staff members a series of questions designed to gather information about what would keep them with the agency.

**How It Works** Each supervisor is expected to periodically ask (perhaps during the performance evaluation conference) each of their direct reports a series of questions, such as:

- What will keep you here?
- What might cause you to leave?
- What is most satisfying about your work?
- Are we fully utilizing your talents?
- What is inhibiting your success?
- What can I do differently to best assist you? (Kaye and Jordan-Evans, p. 7).

Supervisors are then expected to periodically follow up with each staff member in providing whatever way they can to meet the employees needs.

**Why It Works** Simply asking a series of questions similar to those above makes the employee feel valued. Simply asking such questions increases employee loyalty and retention. This strategy also recognizes that each employee is an individual, having their own sets of needs and expectations. To the extent that their individual needs can be met, their satisfaction and loyalty also increases.

**Challenges and Considerations** In agencies with great “dissatisfiers” such as low pay and impossible workloads, this strategy may have minimal impact.

Cost: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ *Mentoring*  
Impact: \*\*

**What It Is** Mentoring programs provide opportunities for less-experienced employees to be paired with more-experienced staff.

**How It Works** There are a variety of approaches to developing mentoring programs. They can be formal programs where the agency uses a structured process to match the mentoring pairs, or they can be quite informal where the new employee is given the option of being paired with a volunteer mentor. In some situations, the mentoring is very “job specific” and resembles on-the-job training. In most situations, however, the mentor helps the new employee “learn the organization” or have access to a “listening ear.” Some

programs pair experienced child welfare workers with higher-level supervisors and managers as a professional development experience to help prepare the child welfare worker for promotional opportunities.

Many child welfare agencies experience very high turnover among newly-hired workers who find the job to be quite different than they expected it to be. Providing additional support can help the new employee make it through this difficult early period.

**Why It Works** There is a wealth of research that shows that an important factor in employee loyalty and retention is the employees' belief that someone in the agency takes a personal interest in them and encourages their development.

**Challenges and Considerations** Mentoring programs can be particularly effective in helping new employees transition into their new jobs. However, in organizations where the workload is very high, experienced employees may resist serving as mentors to new employees because they simply lack the time. Organizations using a career ladder or tier system may assign mentoring responsibilities to the higher classified employees as part of the requirements of the position.

Cost: \$\$\$  
Impact: \*\* *Paperwork Reduction*

**What It Is** Paperwork Reduction programs are job reengineering initiatives designed to eliminate unnecessary paperwork to permit the child welfare worker to have more time to spend on direct client services.

**How It Works** Agencies can reduce paperwork by eliminating unnecessary forms and documentation, reassigning paperwork duties to case aides or clerical staff, and/or designing computer systems that assist with case management responsibilities.

**Why It Works** Most child welfare workers are frustrated by the amount of paperwork required in their jobs and would prefer to spend more time providing direct client services. To the extent that increased job satisfaction leads to job retention, reducing the frustration caused by excessive paperwork should lead to reduced turnover.

**Challenges and Considerations** Introducing technological innovation into the work place can be expensive and disruptive. Automated systems intended to reduce paperwork sometimes create more administrative burdens for the worker, particularly in the short run.

Cost: \$\$

Impact: \*\* *Performance-Based Pay*

**What It Is** Performance-based pay systems provide employee compensation based on individual performance rather than step increases.

**How It Works** There are a variety of approaches to compensating employees based on their performance contributions. Some agencies continue to use traditional pay steps within the pay range to gradually increase the rate of compensation as employees gain experience, but provide additional compensation to better performing employees through the use of periodic bonuses (usually annual) or lump-sum payments. In other agencies, movement from the minimum to the maximum of the pay range is determined exclusively by performance, and base-rate increases are provided based exclusively on merit. Or, an agency may use a combination of merit-driven, base-rate increases and periodic bonus payments.

**Why It Works** For agencies experiencing turnover as a result of low pay, performance-based pay systems may improve retention rates because agencies can use their limited salary budgets more effectively by providing greater monetary rewards to better performers. A three percent increase, for example, under a traditional system provides everyone with

the same increase. Under a performance-based system, the better performers could be given more than three percent if the weaker performers are given less than three percent. Turnover among the better performers should decline not only because their pay becomes more competitive, but also because the recognition makes them feel more valued by the agency.

**Challenges and Considerations** Performance-based pay has the potential of being very effective in reducing turnover among better performers in agencies with limited salary budgets wishing to use their scarce salary dollars more effectively.

Cost: \$

Impact: \*\* *Performance Management*

**What It Is** [Performance Management](#) is the process of maintaining or improving job performance by constructively evaluating and assessing employee performance.

**How It Works** Most well-designed performance management systems have three components:

- Objectives.
- Behaviors or competencies.
- Employee development plans.

At the beginning of each evaluation period, managers and/or employees identify specific work objectives as well as the behaviors/competencies believed to be critical for successful performance. Employees and supervisors may also agree on a development plan designed to improve performance or achieve long-range career objectives. These three components form the basis for the employee's evaluation.

**Why It Works** Employee loyalty and retention are enhanced when employees clearly understand what is expected of them and receive constructive feedback on how they are doing. When used properly, the development plan component provides the employee with the insights and tools necessary to become a better worker and to prepare for future advancement within the agency.

**Challenges and Considerations** Supervisors sometimes resist performance management systems because evaluating employee performance requires a major investment in time, may require the supervisor to confront performance problems, and forces them to be accountable for staff performance. In addition, when supervisory workloads are particularly heavy, supervisors may not have time to do thorough performance reviews.

Cost: \$\$

Impact: \*\*\* *Realistic Job Preview*

**What It Is** A [Realistic Job Preview](#) (RJP) is a recruiting approach that is designed to communicate both the desirable and undesirable aspects of the job before an applicant has accepted a job offer.

**How It Works** Although a RJP can be presented in a variety of formats, such as verbal presentations, job tours and written brochures, a number of human services agencies have used a video portraying the job of a child welfare worker. The videos usually feature child welfare workers describing both the positive and negative aspects of the job, and shows footage of them engaging in a variety of work activities. Agencies that have produced such videos normally require all job applicants to watch the video before being interviewed for the job.

**Why It Works** Much of the turnover in child welfare jobs occurs within the first several months of employment because job applicants accept job offers without having a good understanding of the demands of the job. Worse yet, many applicants have certain expectations and/or perceptions about the job which are inaccurate. After viewing the RJP, those job applicants who conclude that they are not well suited for the demands of the job simply withdraw from the application process. Well produced videos focus on those issues believed

to have an impact on job retention, emphasizing how workers feel about the job rather than just focusing on the mechanics of the job.

A well designed RJP can be expected to significantly reduce turnover of child welfare workers, particularly the turnover that occurs within the first several months of employment when many new workers realize that they made a bad career choice. Research studies have also shown that employees who accept employment offers after seeing RJPs are not only more likely to stay on the job longer, but also show greater job satisfaction and are better able to cope with the demands of the job.

**Challenges and Considerations** Some agencies, particularly those facing serious recruiting difficulties, fear that showing a Realistic Job Preview will further reduce their ability to attract new employees. Others believe that they lack the “know how” to produce an effective video.

Cost: \$\$

Impact: \*\*

*Safety Support*

**What It Is** Agencies can provide Safety Support by taking steps to make employees feel reasonably safe in a job that has inherent risks.

**How It Works** Since many child welfare workers feel at greatest risk when working in the field, some agencies have provided a wide array of solutions, including:

- Safety awareness training.
- Authorizing staff to travel in pairs when making potentially dangerous home calls.
- Use of cell phones and two-way radios.
- Equipping agency vehicles with keyless entry and alarms.
- Requiring staff to prepare detailed field itineraries.
- Requiring field staff to call the office at regular intervals.
- Forging cooperative relationships with local police agencies.
- Conducting risk assessments on families prior to making home calls (by doing on-line criminal history checks).
- Discussing safety related topics at staff meetings.

**Why It Works** Some employees leave the child welfare job because of safety concerns. If employees feel safer, they may be less likely to leave.

**Challenges and Considerations** Perhaps the greatest challenges to addressing “field safety” are in agencies that

have never faced a serious safety crisis and therefore may have become complacent. Despite the concerns of field employees, upper management may fail to take the steps necessary to address employee concerns.

Cost: \$\$  
Impact: \* *Second Language Incentive*

**What It Is** Some agencies pay a Second Language Incentive to child welfare workers who speak a second language.

**How It Works** Agencies that provide an incentive to employees who speak a second language usually pay a premium (either cents per hour or a fixed percentage) above the normal hourly pay rate for all hours worked. Some agencies require that employees pass a language proficiency exam before becoming eligible for the premium. Some agencies also require those employees receiving the premium to serve as a translator on an as needed basis.

**Why It Works** The pay premium not only provides a higher pay rate than the employee would have otherwise received, but also recognizes the additional skill and service provided.

**Challenges and Considerations** Although a relatively small group of people will receive the pay incentive, this solution may have a significant impact on reducing the turnover of employees with a special, and often critical, skill.

Cost: \$\$  
Impact: \*\*\* *Supervisory Development*

**What It Is** Supervisory Development is the process of providing professional development to supervisors and managers to enhance their effectiveness with their staff.

**How It Works** Agencies provide supervisors and managers with training and other developmental opportunities to improve their leadership skills. Good supervisors must know how to clearly set performance expectations, provide ongoing feedback, provide opportunities for their staff's development and growth, and build relationships based on trust. They must be good coaches, communicators and team builders.

**Why It Works** The quality of frontline supervision has a tremendous impact on employee satisfaction, loyalty and retention.

**Challenges and Considerations** Many organizations, particularly small ones, believe they lack the resources to provide good supervisory training and developmental opportunities. Even organizations with good supervisory training and development programs sometimes find it difficult to "change the ways" of some experienced supervisors who have developed poor supervisory skills over many years.

Cost: \$\$

Impact: \*\*\*

### *Telecommuting*

**What It Is** A Telecommuting program allows employees to work from their home rather than commute to the agency's offices to do their regular work.

**How It Works** Experienced child welfare workers work from home, using telephones, computers, fax machines, and possibly other remote capabilities. Participating child welfare workers are able to tap into their agency's computer network from home so that all case-related information is as available at home as it would be in an office setting. Depending on the model, the employees may also have considerable flexibility in determining which hours they will work during the work day. Some agencies may require that the employee be available during core hours to take phone calls, participate in telephone meetings and so on. The employee is also usually expected to arrange field visits at times more convenient to clients, rather than being confined by the more traditional office hours. In some situations, the employee may be scheduled for some hours in the office to be available for meetings, training, etc. Some believe that child welfare worker positions are particularly well suited for telecommuting because of the inherent amount of field work required, the relative ease of monitoring work results, and the flexible scheduling resulting in more convenience to clients.

**Why It Works** Working from home offers employees the advantage of being able to save the time and financial expense of daily commuting to the office setting. Employees may also have considerable flexibility over their working hours within the workday. Employees with young children may be able to reduce or eliminate their day care expenses. Permitting employees such degree of control over their work lives may also help reduce burnout.

**Challenges and Considerations** A telecommuting model requires supervisors to monitor employee performance in an entirely new way – one that some supervisors will have trouble adapting to. Since employees will spend less time in the office setting, the collegial dynamics of casework may also change. The "start up" costs of a telecommuting model may be expensive initially, if the agency chooses to equip home offices with computers, fax machines and dedicated phone lines. These costs may be offset in the long run as a result of reduced office space and equipment.

Cost: \$\$

Impact: \*\*\*

### *Training (In-Service)*

**What It Is** In-Service Training consists of the formal classroom training and on-the-job training that is provided to employees after they have been hired by an agency.

**How It Works** Agencies that believe they can reduce turnover by improving in-service training begin providing thorough and intensive training to new child welfare workers immediately upon hire or within the first few weeks. They also recognize that job-specific training and more general professional-development training opportunities must continue throughout the child welfare worker’s career.

**Why It Works** A career in child welfare is very demanding, relies on the exercise of good judgment and requires thorough training on broad social work principles and often-complex agency policy. Employees, and most particularly new employees, who feel inadequately prepared to cope with the job often end up leaving. Providing the skills employees believe they need to do the job well is critical to job retention.

One-hundred percent of the administrators responding to APHSA’s survey stated that they believed that increased or improved in-service training was at least somewhat effective as a strategy for reducing turnover (APHSA 2005).

**Challenges and Considerations** One of the biggest obstacles to classroom training is relieving employees of their work duties in order to be able to attend training. Experienced employees sometimes resist going to training because they face an accumulated backlog of work upon their return. In the case of newly hired employees, sending them to training

immediately after hire prolongs the length of time other staff must cover vacant caseloads.

|            |                           |
|------------|---------------------------|
| Cost: \$\$ | <i>Tuition Assistance</i> |
| Impact: ** |                           |

**What It Is** Tuition Assistance programs provide financial assistance to child welfare workers pursuing work-related education and/or advanced degrees.

**How It Works** Typically agencies that offer tuition assistance programs provide financial reimbursement for some portion of the tuition and fees to employees who take job-related classes or obtain advanced degrees. Although the policies differ from one agency to another, reimbursement is usually made only after the employee successfully passes the class, may range from 50 to 100 percent reimbursement, and may allow a specified number of hours of paid time off to take the class. Some agencies have a plan that makes use of enhanced Federal funding to reimburse the tuition of employees pursuing a MSW degree. Often, employees are required to agree to work for the agency for a specified period of time in exchange for the tuition reimbursement.

**Why It Works** Tuition assistance programs provide a significant financial benefit and provide professional development opportunities. Child welfare workers may gain confidence in their ability to do the job and believe that they

are enhancing their qualifications for future career opportunities.

**Challenges and Considerations** Tuition assistance can be a very effective retention tool for those employees the agency may most want to keep (i.e., those interested in furthering their own professional development).

Cost: \$ to \$\$\$

### *University Partnerships*

Impact: \* to \*\*\*

**What It Is** Many agencies have formed partnerships with colleges and universities in their state primarily for the purpose of better preparing social work students for jobs in the state’s public child welfare agencies.

**How It Works** Although there are a variety of unique programs, most are directed at better preparing students for jobs in public child welfare agencies. In some states, the agency and universities work together on curriculum design. In some instances the university curriculum is so closely aligned to the agency’s child welfare policies that students hired by the agency do not need to participate in new-worker training. In other instances, the states have contracted with the universities to design and deliver the agency’s training programs.

Some agencies have programs where the agency selects students for employment during their junior year in college, and pays their tuition (and perhaps a stipend) in exchange for a work commitment. In other instances, current child welfare staff enroll in the MSW program, and receive tuition reimbursement in exchange for a work commitment. Sometimes field placements can be arranged so that they occur within the agency, but in a different kind of work assignment.

Many other agencies partner with their universities on various work-study and intern programs. It is very common for students to do their field placements in both public and private agencies in the state.

**Why It Works** Many of the university partnership programs provide social work students with considerable exposure to child welfare agencies and their programs before the employment relationship is formed. Based on that early exposure, students may realize that either the agency or a child welfare job will be a bad fit for them.

**Challenges and Considerations** Although partnerships between the University Schools of Social Work and child welfare agencies hold tremendous potential, there are some minor pitfalls to be aware of. Some agencies have provided funding for stipends to social work students in exchange for work commitments, only to find that budget shortfalls and

hiring freezes prevented them from being able to hire the students after graduation. With regard to internship programs, some supervisors have invested a great deal of time supervising a student placement only to have the student take a job elsewhere after graduation.

## References

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